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SUBJECT: KAZAN REMAINS TIED TO MOSCOW DESPITE TATARSTAN'S "MODEL" FEDERALISM

Classified By: Political M/C Alice Wells for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Despite its unique status within the Russian Federation negotiated with the central government under Yeltsin in 1994 and again with Putin in 2007, Tatarstan is firmly part of Russia and seems set to remain so under Medvedev. President Mintimer Shamiyev is currently very much in favor both in Moscow and with the local population, and is likely to hold onto power for as long as he wants. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During a pre-election visit to Kazan we met with government and religious leaders (septel) as well as analysts of local politics and representatives of civil society. Tatarstan has a unique place in the Russian Federation. Tatarstan enjoyed its own statehood prior to its annexation by Russia in 1552. In 1937 it lost its autonomy after the adoption of Stalin's constitution. In August 1990 Tatarstan proclaimed the "declaration of state sovereignty of the Republic of Tatarstan" because it wanted to sign the proposed Union Treaty as an independent subject and not as a constituent part of the Russian Federation. In August 1991 Moscow and Kazan began negotiations resulting in the signing on February 15, 1994 of the "Russia-Tatarstan Treaty." The two sides agreed upon a second ten-year treaty in June 2007. According to our interlocutors, Tatarstan's population consists of two main ethnic groups, Tatars (53 percent) and Russians (47 percent), although most with whom we spoke explained that these numbers are misleading since there are so many mixed marriages in Tatarstan and the children are left to self-select to which ethnic group they wish to belong. The Constitution of Tatarstan provides for both Tatar and Russian as official languages and the president of Tatarstan must know both languages.

Kazan firmly in Moscow's embrace

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¶3. (C) Nail Mukharyamov, Director of the Institute of Economy and Social Technologies and Chair of the Politics and Law Department at the Kazan University of Power Engineering, said that President Shamiyev is firmly in the United Russia camp. Shamiyev was one of the four original founders of United Russia (along with Boris Gryzlov, Sergey Shoygu and Yuriy Luzhkov) and the only non-Russian and non-Moscovite. During our visit it did not appear that many in Kazan had given much thought as to who might replace Shamiyev (or that he would be leaving the presidency anytime soon), although Mukharyamov thought likely candidates included Kamil Ishakov, former Kazan mayor and current Deputy Minister of Regional Development, and Ilshat Fardiyev, Shamiyev's nephew and currently the head of Tatenergo, one of several state-owned companies involved in the republic's energy sector. Tatarstan has 11 members in the current Russian Duma.

¶4. (SBU) In the March 2 presidential elections turnout in

Tatarstan was high -- but even at over 80 percent it was still bested by perennial turnout champions from the North Caucasus. President-elect Dmitriy Medvedev, who had visited Tatarstan twice in 2007 and again in late February 2008 just before the elections stressing education and youth development issues, received a very respectable 79.24 percent of the vote there (although again Tatarstan was behind the North Caucasus, Bashkortostan and several regions that over-fulfilled the Kremlin's directive for votes for Medvedev in order to make up for their lackluster showing for pro-Kremlin parties in the December 2007 Russian Duma elections).

¶ 15. (C) Edward Khabibullin, Head of the America, Europe and CIS Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs within President Shamiyev's administration, believed that federalism (its relations with the center) is the biggest issue facing Tatarstan. Rafael Khakimov, Advisor to President Shamiyev and Tatarstan's chief specialist on federalism and relations with Russia, confirmed that the federal government pays for activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Federal Security Service (FSB) in Tatarstan, but he and others complained that the republic pays more to Moscow in taxes (by a two to one margin) than it receives back in social welfare or other benefits. Both Khakimov and Khabibullin stressed that laws promulgated by the Russian State Duma may not violate the constitution of Tatarstan.

#### Housing and Transport Biggest Problems

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¶ 16. (C) Khakimov downplayed the importance of Medvedev's "national priorities" saying that, as had been its right under its agreements with Moscow, Tatarstan has long been involved in the "national priorities" on its own long before

the federal government. Khakimov and others agreed that housing (one of the foremost "national priorities" championed by Medvedev) was a big problem throughout Tatarstan, but especially in Kazan. According to recent statistics published in a Moscow-based newspaper, Tatarstan ranks high (behind Moscow, St. Petersburg and Krasnodar) in the construction of new housing and numerous cranes hovered over parts of the city during our visit. Representatives from Eko Moskvy in Kazan (a locally-owned radio station that rebroadcasts Moscow-generated programming, with local advertising and 15 minutes per hour of local news) also agreed that affordable housing, particularly for people whose houses in the center of Kazan have been destroyed as part of urban renewal projects, is a big problem. They added that from 5,000-6,000 people in Tatarstan were also involved in the kind of real estate scams that plagued Russia during the 1990s. To make matters worse, after a recent tender for mini-bus services tainted by corruption, there is not sufficient public transport for the 30 percent of residents dependent on it.

#### Civil Society Weak

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¶ 17. (C) Like the rest of Russia, civil society is underdeveloped in Tatarstan. Dmitriy Kolbassin, a media freedom specialist formerly with the Kazan Human Rights Center and now with the human rights organization AGORA, said that although over 1,000 NGOs have been formed in Tatarstan, only a few dozen are active and have complied with the new registration requirements. He stated that AGORA has not had much of a problem, although a meeting several months ago with a British diplomat at a local cafe did result in an FSB visit to his office. Kolbassin said there was little active political opposition in Tatarstan and could not imagine a dissenters' march in Kazan.

#### Limited Practical Use of Tatarstan's Sovereignty

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¶ 18. (C) Both Khakimov and Khabibullin stated that Tatarstan's sovereignty could become a model for other regions in Russia.

Khabibullin noted that there are many ethnic Tatars spread throughout Russia, giving Kazan's agreement with Moscow added resonance. When pressed, however, both admitted that other regions had not been as active in their negotiations with Moscow and at this stage probably could not use the Russia-Tatarstan Treaty as a model. According to Khabibullin, Tatarstan has made some limited diplomatic use of its sovereignty. He stated that Tatarstan plans to ask for observer status to the Jeddah-based Organization of the Islamic Conference. He proudly noted that there are Turkish and Iranian consulates in Kazan as well as cultural/educational centers from the United States, Germany, Japan and France. He added that Tatarstan's representative office in Moscow employs 60 people and that Tatarstan has its own representatives in Russian diplomatic missions in the U.S., Turkey, France, the Czech Republic, Finland, Vietnam and Cuba.

Comment

¶ 9. (C) For now, Moscow and Kazan have developed a mutually beneficial relationship based on Tatarstan's unique place in Russian history and its ability to drive a hard bargain originally with a weakened center under Yeltsin. Its uniqueness may have protected Tatarstan during Putin's drive to retake power devolved to the regions (Tatneft remains owned by the government, providing Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov reason enough to dream of the same deal for Chechnya's own smaller indigenous oil industry). Although some in the republic may continue to complain about the inequity of tax payments to Moscow, we see no reason for the relationship to change under Medvedev, especially while Shamiyev remains Tatarstan's loyal president.

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